

Michael Craig-Martin

Birds of Paradise

Opening, 23rd November 2022, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition, 24th November, 2022 – 4th March 2023

The artist Michael Craig-Martin (born in Dublin in 1941) has been immersed in a world of industrially manufactured objects since the 1970s. Since then, he has continuously enlarged and updated this universe of objects, using them to explore the aesthetics of contemporary consumer society everywhere. In retrospect, one can say that Craig-Martin's oeuvre up to today serves as a documentary archive, recording not only our shift from the analogue to the digital world, but also the constant acceleration in production and everyday consumption, as well as the never-ending growth of the sheer range of products that are made.

In essence, Michael Craig-Martin is known for his brightly coloured, starkly reduced depictions of industrially produced objects found in everyday life. These include our irreplaceable day-to-day electronic companions such as AirPods, iPhones, and MacBooks, but also design classics such as high back trainers or the Barcelona chair. All of these and more have been immortalised by the 'father of the Young British Artists' using his acrylic paints in the alternative colour spectrum, and always reduced to their most elementary lines. By radically breaking these objects down to their foundational essences, Craig-Martin turns them into icons – and thus gives objects back the visibility they have lost, having become invisible to us thanks to their ubiquity and accessibility.

This Irish-born artist has recently been playing with the criteria that define 'industrial' production. In particular, organic products such as cut flowers, fruit, and vegetables have now found their way into Michael Craig-Martin's works. But even though representations of nature have long been a traditional subject of painting, one is not immediately inclined to assign the work of Craig-Martin to this genre.

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The Birds of Paradise exhibition presents images depicting cut flowers and vegetable collages alongside well-known motifs such as USB sticks and corkscrews. However, although these objects initially seem very incongruous – nature versus technology – they all faithfully follow the principle of Michael Craig-Martin's work, as they represent objects from today's consumer society that have become so commonplace in our everyday lives that we hardly even notice them. Yet tomatoes and avocados, like sunflowers or MacBooks, are also mass-produced, and thus they too represent the fact that organic goods can be manufactured just like artificial goods. These new motifs are a logical extension of Craig-Martin's pictorial vocabulary. In many respects, it becomes apparent that this artist is in fact building on a number of traditions running through European art history. On the one hand, his flower and vegetable still lifes can be seen as an homage to Dutch still life painting of the 17th century – but subject to a modern interpretation by Craig-Martin, i.e. instead of true-to-nature colours and vanitas, he presents an expressionistic colour selection, in harmony not with nature but with contemporary product design. On the other hand, his selection of motifs, based on their everyday character, creates a connection to the viewer. In this way, Craig-Martin manages – in the spirit of Pop Art – to build a bridge between art and day-to-day life. Thus, the artist positions himself, both in terms of form and content, in this area of tradition as well. It is ordinariness that forms the framework for Michael Craig-Martin's work. As he put it, 'I wanted ordinary drawing, ordinary objects, ordinary colour.'

A Professor Emeritus at Goldsmith's College in London, Michael Craig-Martin is one of the most renowned contemporary British artists. His works can be found in numerous international collections such as the Tate Modern Gallery in London, the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. In 2015, he also had his first major solo show in Asia titled 'NOW'. It was shown as a touring exhibition in the Himalayas Museum in Shanghai and in the Hubei Museum of Art in Wuhan. Craig-Martin was also honoured for his services to the arts in 2016 as part of Queen Elizabeth II's birthday celebrations.

The gallery is extremely pleased to present the third solo exhibition of Michael Craig-Martin's on Talstrasse in Zurich.

Gwendolyn Fässler
Justine Krämer